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Constantinople and the straits: The past and the future

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other subject except literature. The Geography teacher must be well read. The text-book, which is the pupil's stand-by, should appear to him as merely so many avenues of approach to his full knowledge—a kind of index to keep fresh his memory of authorities. In these days, when school age may extend into the early twenties, fulness of knowledge is a debt to the student, who after all is responsible for none of the handicaps that dog the teacher's path, and even in this age it is still worth something to move in the world of men, and to be able to step into the midst of futile argument and display irrefutable truth.

Of inestimable benefit is a well-selected geographical library. Home-reading from this library should be encouraged in the same way as home-reading of literature. A school that is well equipped with apparatus and books can hardly fail to produce creditable pupils.

CONSTANTINOPLE AND THE STRAITS: THE PAST AND THE FUTURE.

By MARION I. NEWBIGIN, D.Sc. (Lond.).

IT has now become widely recognised that Near Eastern questions played a very large part in bringing about the great war, and that hopes of prolonged peace in the future can only be entertained if an adequate solution of these is found. This being so, there is everything to gain from a free and full discussion of all aspects of the problems involved, among which the geographical are certainly not the least important. We have published here a number of articles dealing with various sides of the geography of the Balkans, but have hitherto given no special attention to the question of the desirable future political position of the Bosporus and the Dardanelles and of the city of Constantinople. Advantage may, therefore, be taken of two recent publications[1] in order to indicate some of the main geographical facts which bear upon this subject.

The two publications are markedly different in purpose and outlook as well as in bulk, for the one is a short pamphlet and the other a book of considerable size. But to some extent they supplement each other, for Mr. Dominian writes from the geographical point of view, while Dr. Phillipson and Mr. Buxton deal primarily with political and legal problems, and offer a definite solution of the question mentioned on their title-page. Their absorption in legal technicalities to a certain extent obscures the geographical factors, and it is here that Mr. Dominian's small pamphlet becomes specially helpful. It throws light incidentally, for example, upon certain statistics in regard to the trade

[1] *The Question of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles.* By Coleman Phillipson, M.A., LL.D., Litt.D., and Noel Buxton, M.A., M.P. London: Stevens and Haynes, 1917. Price 12s. 6d.

The Site of Constantinople: A Factor of Historical Value. By Leon Dominian. Reprint from the *Journal* of the American Oriental Society, vol. xxxvii., 1917.

through the Straits given in the book, for these require commentary before their significance is grasped.

Our discussion here may conveniently be divided into two parts. It is necessary, first, to look at the problem of Constantinople and the Straits as this arises from the geographical position of the two, and as it has varied in historical time; and second, to discuss the solution of the problem which Messrs. Phillipson and Buxton offer, in so far as this solution has geographical bearings; its political significance is, of course, beyond our scope. Before doing this, however, it seems desirable to give some general account of their book.

We may note, first, that the solution which they suggest is that the Bosporus and Dardanelles be internationalised—not neutralised, for the latter term implies the exclusion of warships, and the authors propose that the Straits should be open to both merchantmen and warships, in times of war as well as of peace. In their own words:—"The most rational, judicious, and practicable solution is to internationalise the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles on the lines of the *régime* applied to the Suez Canal, and place them, together with sufficient hinterland to safeguard the strategic position, under the administration of an International Commission somewhat similar to that which has existed in the case of the Danube." In regard to Constantinople they say:—"The best solution in the circumstances is without doubt to constitute it a free town, and place it under the conjoint protection of the Powers, including the United States."

The two authors of the book are the one an authority on international law, and the other a member of Parliament who has taken a special interest in Near Eastern questions. No indication, however, is given, so far as we have been able to find, of the part which each has taken in its preparation, and this in spite of the fact that in more than one case mention is made, in the singular number, of "the writer" in dealing with particular statements. We regard this omission as unfortunate. The book contains a detailed discussion of the position of waterways in international law, with an historical account of the treaties made in regard to the Straits, and of the subsequent development and modification of these. It contains in addition a proposed solution of the problems concerned which has definite political bearings. If the two subjects are treated separately by the two authors, it would surely conduce to clearness if this fact were stated. For it is obvious that legal and political discussions are necessarily conducted from different standpoints. If we may take an analogy, no prudent geographer would accept the maps and time-tables of a particular railway company without question as representing the actual state of affairs in regard to the railway system of the country concerned. It is well recognised that such maps represent those conditions in which the particular company is interested, but that their appearance may be very greatly modified if other facts, of no immediate interest to it, are also inserted. In the same way a political document tends naturally to lay stress upon those facts which make a special appeal to a particular group of individuals, and often shows a largely unconscious tendency to slur over others. On the other hand,

a statement of the law as it applies to a particular set of conditions should, so far as possible, set forth all the relevant circumstances. If the two modes of presentation are to be combined in one volume, and especially if they are due to two different hands, it is desirable that the line of demarcation between them should be as clear as possible.

Further, there is a certain suggestion that in the preparation of the book authorities have been used in what we may without offence describe as a political fashion. The politician, since by definition he is concerned to advocate a particular policy, is apt to appeal chiefly to authors who set forth a point of view agreeing with his own. The impartial student, desirous of forming an independent judgment, desires to know, especially in regard to matters of opinion, whether there is a possibility that the views of a particular author are or are not coloured by the fact that he is already committed to a particular policy.

The book does not contain a complete or annotated bibliography. There is a list of works and documents referred to, mostly in English or French, several of which have been written during the war. To some of these works the authors attach great importance as representing public opinion. In one case, indeed, an almost crucial importance, as we shall see later, is attached, at a critical point in the argument, to a book by Mr. N. Dascovici, published in French at Geneva. But the question of the extent to which this author can be regarded as representing a large body of opinion is not discussed, nor is his nationality stated.

Finally, to conclude all that we have to say in detailed criticism of the book, we may add that the index is inadequate for the needs of the student.

Turning now to the actual problem under discussion, we have to note, first, the geographical importance of the Straits and of Constantinople in the past and in the present. The first point which emerges is that the presence of the Black Sea, and, across a relatively narrow isthmus, of the Caspian, together with the existence of the frozen tundra in the north, and, to a less degree, of the Ural Mountains, divides the chief land ways between Europe and Asia into two, a northern and a southern group. The easiest northern way leads through the Caspian Gate, and involves the crossing of the great river Volga. The southern ways lead through Asia Minor and involve the crossing of the Bosporus, itself in origin apparently but a sunken river valley.

But if in earlier days these land ways led from Asia into Europe, now the direction of movement is from Europe to Asia. The northern routes are held by the Slav, whose advance into Asia was the distinguishing feature of the pre war period. The main southern route, in the years immediately preceding the war, was in act of being seized by the Teuton. "Latterly," say Messrs. Phillipson and Buxton, "the influence of Germany has been supreme at Constantinople, having displaced that of Russia; and it is not too much to say that this Germanic penetration into the dominions of the Sultan is virtually responsible as the proximate cause for the outbreak of the present war."

In other words, the consciousness of enormous military strength, coupled perhaps with some appreciation of impending financial difficulties, both in Austria and Germany, induced the dominant party there to abandon the policy of slow penetration and to make a gambler's throw.

But this is not all. The problem is enormously complicated by the fact that Constantinople and the Bosporus stand at a crossing-place of routes, for the Straits form Russia's only access to a permanently ice-free sea. It is the *increasing* importance of this outlet, not only for Russia but for Western Europe generally, which has been instrumental in leading to recent changes of policy on the part of the Great Powers in the Near East.

This aspect of the question Messrs. Phillipson and Buxton do not perhaps emphasise sufficiently. They appear to regard the difficulty as primarily due to the struggle between Slav and Teuton for dominance in Asia, embittered by the existence at an important crossing-point of roads of the alien Turkish Empire, an Empire incapable of developing the resources of its own lands, and "disposed to enter into the sinister policy of secret transactions and ambiguous relationships." But, as the tables which they quote in another part of their book show, in the long list of nations whose merchant ships pass the Bosporus, Russia's share is relatively small, Germany's insignificant, while this country largely predominates. Thus for the three years 1911-13, of the total shipping passing through the Straits an average of 41 per cent. by tonnage flew the British flag. Greece came next with 15 per cent., then Austria-Hungary with 11 per cent., while Russia had under 8 per cent., and Germany 6 per cent.

Russia is thus supremely interested in the freedom of the passage of the Bosporus in that she has much to sell, which can only find an easy exit by this route. But the other nations of the world, and more especially this country, are also greatly interested, in that they find round the Black Sea important raw materials. The fact that raw material is so largely carried in British ships gives the question of the control of the Bosporus enormous interest for us, no less than for Slav or Teuton. Thus the growing importance of the products of the lands round the Black Sea—on all sides save the as yet almost undeveloped south—has been steadily increasing the significance of the north-to-south road through the Bosporus. As yet the cross-road, that from west-to-east, the Berlin-Baghdad route, remains potentially rather than actually important.

Now the presence of the Turk at Constantinople has led, among other difficulties, to vexatious interference with through traffic by the Bosporus. Germany, to facilitate her extension into Asia Minor, wishes to keep the Turk at Constantinople, and so perpetuate a condition of instability; for we are far indeed from the time when the Sultan of Turkey could maintain that the Euxine was a "chaste and pure virgin," inaccessible to outsiders. One aspect of the present war, then, is that those parts of Europe interested in the traffic in raw materials through the Bosporus are in conflict with those who, from a variety of motives,

are combining to obstruct north-to-south traffic, with a view to the ultimate development of a great east-to-west and west-to-east line of traffic. Military questions also, of course, greatly complicate the problem.

Further, since southern Russia, if not Asiatic, is at least extra-European in being a large producer of raw material which must find external markets, we may say that the two roads which cross at Constantinople are rival lines of access to raw material. Most of the Western Powers, together with most of the Mediterranean states, seek, as the latter have always sought, access to grain, to which petroleum has recently been added. Germany seeks especially the cotton and minerals of Asia Minor, with, in addition, various types of sub-tropical produce other than cotton of which she has need, as well as access to potential markets for her manufactured goods. That access to Asia Minor, and, ultimately, to the great Asiatic world beyond, would, once established, render a blockade of her ports relatively innocuous, is, of course, for her a point of great importance, in view of British sea-power. To obtain her ends, she seeks to prop up the falling Turkish Empire. For most of the other states, including even the present Turkish ally of Bulgaria, Turkey has been in the past an intolerable anachronism. Turkey herself, that Asiatic interloper, has found, as she has always found, the possibility of continued existence in the rivalries and conflicting interests of the European states. This seems to us the essence of the position, and we may turn next to Mr. Dominian's pamphlet as throwing additional light upon the present through its descriptions of the past.

Mr. Dominian regards the choice by Constantine of the site for the capital which bears his name as evidence that by this time (330 A.D.) Asia had become of more importance for the Roman Empire than Africa. The Roman Empire, no less than ancient Greece, and the Italy and Greece of to-day, was not self-supporting, but required external supplies, especially of grain, but of other products in addition. By the fourth century the wealth of ancient Africa had been undermined, its resources had been drained. To Constantinople, as a result of its marvellous position, came the grain, especially the wheat, of the plains lying to the north of the Black Sea, as well as the fur, slaves, honey, and wax of the as yet undeveloped north. To it also came the silks, gums, dyes, spices, gems, and all the other products of Asia. It was the great centre, storehouse, and mart, and from it were supplied first the Slavs and later the inhabitants of most of northern and western Europe with the articles of luxury which could only be found in the East. It became, therefore, a great merchant town, and, as Mr. Dominian emphasises strongly, it did not need to sell abroad in the modern fashion, for the merchants came from all parts of the western world to buy in the great city. With its access to raw material and to articles of luxury, it thus gave a new lease of life to the Roman Empire.

One result, and it is one whose effects remain to the present day, was that almost from the first Constantinople was a cosmopolitan city, one in which men of many races dwelt together, but did not blend nor mix. Right down through the centuries Greek, Armenian, Slav, with

later Turks and Arabs, have dwelt here side by side, each race retaining its special characteristics.

Still another historic fact, directly due to the peculiarities of the site, is that for a threatened empire—for the Roman no less than for the Turkish—Constantinople was, and is, an incomparable capital. As we have but too good reason to know, its position renders it all but impregnable, save perhaps from the west, and then it can be assaulted only with great difficulty. For an empire constantly engaged in border fighting it is also, says Mr. Dominian, "the ideal site from a military standpoint." It forms a centre from which armies can move out in many directions to threatened areas; while to it, as to a central fortress, defeated armies can retreat till the opportunity comes for a fresh offensive.

Whatever also may in the future be true of the value of the city from a military standpoint, its commercial significance, based securely upon advantages of site, is likely, in Mr. Dominian's opinion, to remain great. He says:—"Overland traffic between Europe and Asia—that is to say, between European centres of industry and the Asiatic markets of consumption situated in the densely peopled regions of the eastern continent, is bound to pass through Constantinople, because the city lies on the path of shortest distance between the two centres. Even the air line, which we must henceforth take into account, passes over Constantinople in its shortest stretch between populous India and industrial Europe." As will be noted later, however, it is not perfectly certain that this statement takes all the facts into account.

Mr. Dominian regards the question of the future of the town and of the Straits as beyond his scope. But he points out that if internationalisation be the adopted solution, it would be possible to establish a geographically well defined neutral zone by taking the Ergene valley as a boundary to the west, and to the east a line defined by the Sakaria valley and a fault line distinguished on the map by a string of lakes. This is an area far greater than Messrs. Phillipson and Buxton, if we understand them aright, contemplate in their own scheme.

To that scheme we may turn next, limiting ourselves strictly, however, to its geographical aspects. The authors express the opinion that the occupation of Constantinople by Russia would be a danger to Europe at large, and also to Russia herself. To Russia, for they consider apparently that the significance of the site is such that its inclusion in the former Empire might lead to a splitting-off of the southern provinces from the northern, and thus to dismemberment. In other words, they seem to suggest that Constantinople has too many advantages of site to form a second city in any state; they believe that it would tend to dominate any country in which it was included.

They add, further, that internationalisation or neutralisation under Russian sovereignty would not be a satisfactory solution, for "Europe could not be reconciled thereto." It is here that Mr. Dascovici is quoted as showing that a Russian administration could not be satisfactory, and it is added that "Modern Europe is in reality as much opposed as Napoleon was to the possession of Constantinople and the

Bosphorus by Russia." The evidence for this is, however, not discussed in detail.

The question of the Straits we do not propose to discuss further, beyond emphasising, once again, that in so far as it involves free, unrestricted navigation it is far from being a purely Russian problem. Russia, Rumania, Bulgaria, and even other more westerly states through the Danube, must have, if there is to be peace, an unrestricted outlet here to the seas of the world. Almost all the European states, again, are concerned with the question of the free inlet. That the Turk, with all his military strength, with all the power given by his hold on Constantine's city, can hold the gate for ever against this double current of traffic would appear impossible. Geographically, it is only necessary to emphasise the number of states interested in the problem: details of a settlement which will tend to reconcile the conflicting interests of the different parties must be left to the diplomats.

The question of Constantinople is, however, rather different. Messrs. Phillipson and Buxton quote, though without comment, and without even giving it a place in their index, Mr. Toynbee's estimate of the present composition of the population of the city. This is as follows:—estimated total, 874,000, including 385,000 Moslems, 153,000 Greeks, 150,000 Armenians, 129,000 foreign subjects, 44,000 Jews, 13,000 others. Mr. Toynbee (*Nationality and the War*, 1915) goes on to say that the present Turkish superiority in numbers is largely artificial, being due to the official and retired official circles with their immense households, and to the numerous dock labourers. It is quite probable, as is suggested, that if the Turks lost Constantinople a large number of these Moslems would follow the Administration to its new quarters, wherever these might be, and that the Turkish majority would thus be greatly reduced, or even obliterated. Such migration has tended to happen in the past when Turkish territory has changed hands, and would probably happen again.

But even if it occurred, the fact would remain that the population of the city, now as in the past, is a jumble of nationalities. Constantinople, perhaps as the nemesis of its advantages of site, has never been able to produce citizens in the strict sense. It has always been a bazaar, a meeting-point of traders of all nationalities, a centre of intrigue and bargaining, dominated by military force—not the brain of a well-defined entity which looks to it for inspiration and guidance. Mr. Toynbee regards the Greek element as that which will, if the Turks depart, preponderate over all others, but he is alive to the danger to peace which an autonomous state of Constantinople, forming a Greece outside the kingdom of Greece, would present. Messrs. Phillipson and Buxton, in their brief treatment of the problem of the city, beyond the suggestion, already noted, that it should be placed under the "conjoint protection of the Powers, including the United States," do not discuss the supremely difficult questions to which an internationalised Constantinople would necessarily give rise.

But some of these difficulties are so obvious that a solution which does not recognise them is no solution at all. If we leave aside alto-

gether the Turkish element, and consider only the Greeks, Armenians, and Jews, some of these difficulties become at once apparent. All three races—using the word in its generalised sense—have in the past shown, where they are town-dwellers, a remarkable capacity for thriving within the Turkish Empire. All, again where town-dwellers, and, especially, therefore, in Constantinople, have tended to appropriate certain forms of trade and commerce, for which the Turk shows but little aptitude. All have tended therefore, within the towns, to form classes rather than communities.

Again, if, as seems possible, some form of independent or semi-independent Armenia arises as a result of the war, then the Armenians of Constantinople, like the Greeks of Constantinople at present, will be extra-territorial members of an organised state. Now the presence, within the heterogeneous Austrian Empire, of extra-territorial members of independent states has been everywhere recognised as one of the causes of the unrest which led to the war. So strongly, indeed, has this been felt that not a few writers bluntly express the opinion that there will be no peace in Europe while large groups of human beings, who regard themselves as belonging by race to a particular state, live outside the boundaries of that state, and within a neighbouring one—or, in other words, while there are irredentist lands. But the proposed Internationalised Constantinople, whatever its boundaries, would be an artificial community, afflicted from the start with that racial heterogeneity which has been the bane of Austria-Hungary. Further, while, for example, the Serbs of Bosnia-Herzegovina, or the Rumanians of Transylvania are, at least to a considerable extent, communities, including representatives of different classes of society, the nationalities within Constantinople tend, as we have seen, to form classes. Is the government of the internationalised town to be imposed by "the Powers," without regard to the wishes or interests of the inhabitants? If so, how are those Powers to reconcile their own conflicting interests? Or is it to be determined from within, and if so, by which element, Greek, or Armenian, or Jew, or "foreign subject"? Is the Greek within to be allowed to form a combination with the Greek without in order to sway the other Powers in his favour? Has not the Turk remained at Constantinople just because within it, as in Turkey-in-Europe at large, each element of the population has more or less fought for its own hand, while the diplomats of the Powers have similarly struggled unceasingly with each other? Turkey, say our authors, "must withdraw from Constantinople and the Straits territory, and leave both to Europe to be made free and to be internationalised." But can Europe free the inhabitants of a city which has found profit in servitude, and how, in detail, can this be done? It would be rash for the geographer at least to say that the suggested solution is unworkable, but it seems necessary to point out that it is no solution so long as no attempt is made to face the difficulties.

It seems desirable also to indicate that the fact that Constantinople has in the past been of very great strategic and economic importance, both under the Romans and under the Turks, does not necessarily prove that it may keep this importance unchanged when the conditions alter.

Smyrna to-day is Constantinople's rival as the outlet of Asia Minor, and were it not that the Baghdad Railway had been deliberately arranged to promote the interests of Constantinople as against those of the former city, its importance would be greater than it now is. As Mr. Woods points out in his article on the Baghdad Railway in the *Geographical Journal* for July last, the course of the Baghdad Railway was planned by Germany and Turkey so as to give those Powers control of the long land route from Berlin to Baghdad free from the menace of naval power. "So long as the forts of the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus remain intact, the Sultan and his Allies enjoy the advantages of naval power in a limited area—the Bosphorus, the Sea of Marmora, and the Dardanelles—without the possession of a fleet."

The Baghdad Railway gives increased importance to Constantinople, while Smyrna has been deliberately cut off from the direct route. But this only shows once again that, held by a soldier state, Constantinople is bound to have its economic significance artificially increased for strategic reasons. The possibility that, held by a Power which was not strongly military, or whose strategic centre lay elsewhere, it might diminish in importance, is at least worth discussion. But our immediate purpose here is only to suggest that no solution of a profoundly difficult problem can be satisfactory which does not take into account all the geographical factors involved.

It may perhaps be added, in order to emphasise the importance of the problem, that the fact that, so far as appears at present, Germany's direct attack on British naval power has failed, greatly enhances for her the value of the Berlin-Baghdad route, which, if securely held, would, as shown, enable her to a very considerable extent to circumvent that power.

PROCEEDINGS OF THE ROYAL SCOTTISH GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY.

Lecture Session, 1917-18.

The opening lecture of the session will be delivered in Edinburgh by Dr. C. Delgado de Carvalho on November 29, his subject being "The Geography of Brazil in Relation to its Political and Economic Development." The lecture will be repeated before the Dundee, Aberdeen, and Glasgow centres on the 21st, 23rd, and 27th November respectively.

Mr. A. F. Whyte, M.P. will address the Edinburgh centre on December 20. His subject will be "The New Europe." The same lecture will be delivered at Aberdeen, Dundee, and Glasgow on the 18th, 19th, and 21st December respectively.

The following lectures will be delivered in 1918:—"America in Arms," by the Rev. John Kelman, D.D., Aberdeen, January 29; Dundee, January 30; Edinburgh, January 31; and Glasgow, February 1. "China's Geography: Historical and Social," by Mr. S. G. Cheng, Aberdeen, February 26; Dundee, February 27; Edinburgh, February